COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND RESOURCES

OPENING STATEMENT OF
CHAIRMAN DARRELL ISSA

Oversight Hearing:

"The Next Generation Nuclear Plant and Hydrogen Production: A Critical Status Report"

September 20, 2006

Nuclear power is enjoying a global resurgence because of its environmental benefits and the expected growth in demand for electricity. In the US, there is also interest in building new plants because the current fleet of reactors is aging and electricity demand is projected to rise 40 to 50 percent by 2030.

The Next Generation Nuclear Plant is part of a federal government effort to advance commercial nuclear reactor designs beyond the current generation that is being deployed around the world. Additionally, the NGNP is a key component in the Administration's plans to develop the "hydrogen economy." An important purpose of the advanced nuclear demonstration plant is to produce hydrogen on a large scale.

Congress has given the plant a "drop-dead date" of September 30, 2021 for construction and the beginning of operation. The Department of Energy seems to be following a schedule that will cut it close with the deadline. Independent advisory panels and task forces have criticized DOE's schedule for being too slow—too slow to be of use to the private sector and too slow to not die a slow death due to a lack of political support.

Of particular concern in the NGNP project is the development of a number of technologies that will ensure project milestones are met and construction will be completed on schedule. Even

meeting the timetable does not provide a guarantee that the demonstration plant will not be overtaken by other commercial technologies that may be developed sooner.

In addition, delays in meeting milestones will call into question the continued support for the NGNP considering other nuclear priorities, such as the Nuclear 2010 and Global Nuclear Energy Partnership programs that require considerable federal financial backing.

Today we will hear from the Government Accountability Office regarding an assessment that it prepared at my request. We will also hear from a representative of the Idaho National Laboratory, where much of the R&D work is being done. Last we will hear from a Professor at MIT who is a former CEO in the nuclear industry and has a great deal of knowledge regarding advanced reactor design.

Today we welcome:

- Mr. Jim Wells from the GAO;
- Mr. Phil Hildebrandt from INL; and
- Dr. Andrew Kadak from MIT.

I look forward to hearing your testimony.